

Traffic calming could be coming to Wells Street after residents' concerns

Traffic calming measures could soon be coming to Wells Street.

Council voted last week to install four way stops where Wells Street meets both Connaught Avenue and Harrison Avenue, should these measures be supported by 80 per cent of the surrounding community.

The decision came following a delegation to Council by area resident John Hartman who said speeds have long been a factor in the area.

'The current issues are excessive speed and safety of kids in a growing neighbourhood,' he told Council. 'Driver behaviour needs to change on Wells Street and throughout the Town. Town Square, once completed, will increase our traffic volume and most likely speed.'

Exacerbating traffic in the area of Wells Street, he added, is its proximity to the Aurora GO Station, with many commuters taking up on-street parking, although summer events like the Aurora Farmers' Market and Concerts in the Park, while a traffic factor, were more manageable.

To underscore his point last fall, Mr. Hartman invited Councillor Sandra Humfries to see the situation for herself.

Ahead of last week's Council meeting she brought forward a motion to get these four-way stops in place, but some Councillors were less than convinced it would achieve the desired outcome.

'Wells at Connaught and Harrison are two-way stops right now [and] when you're driving along you almost think it should be a four-way but it is not? It's a street that allows itself to have that type of behaviour,' said Councillor Humfries. 'It would really help safety measures in this area. I am worried about not doing anything.'

While Council supported the idea overall, more information was needed before any four-way stops are put in place.

Speaking to Council, Mr. Hartman said he had done an informal survey of residents but Council members pressed for staff to continue the process of gauging neighbourhood support, a door-to-door effort that was halted due to the global pandemic.

'I appreciate the process,' said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. 'I drive Wells Street every single day and can definitely agree Connaught could probably use a stop sign. I personally believe Harrison is too close [and] could potentially cause traffic to be more clogged up and actually cause more disruption than what it's intended to. I just want to see those numbers?I would really hate to see us installing the stop sign?without having that data and all of a sudden we have a bunch of residents saying, 'I didn't know about this. Nobody told me.'

'I would not want to say today, 'Let's put that in' and then have a backlash because they didn't feel they were properly notified. I would like to believe everything the delegate is saying, but I want to have that proper process.'

Concerns over process were also voiced by Councillors John Gallo and Michael Thompson.

Citing that a traffic study of the area showing that existing traffic warrants weren't met to justify the placement of the stop signs, both suggested it was time to review the entire warrant process.

'If we have [these matters before Council] enough times that warrants aren't met there are safety issues then maybe look at the warrants,' said Councillor Gallo. 'If we're responsible for stop signs, surely we can look at the warrants and say they don't fit our community?and we should fix them.'

Added Councillor Thompson on the traffic warrants, "It's true, we're all over the place. I think it is a true comment that perhaps the warrants aren't necessarily reflective of the needs we have [in Aurora]."

Both Councillors ultimately supported the installation of the signs should the threshold of community support be met as did Councillor Harold Kim, who said he agreed it was time to revisit existing traffic warrants.

"Most of us have known all along that anything that is born by the Province, any Provincial regulations, are essentially a one-size-fits-all type that [don't] often fit the community that it is supposed to regulate," he said. "I think these warrants are definitely one of those regs that does not fit the Town of Aurora in many cases."

"Speed on a narrow road like this is critical. I will vote in favour because I do believe that the local residents know their neighbourhood better than someone outside their neighbourhood."

Support for a four-way stop at Wells and Connaught pending neighbourhood approval passed on a vote of 6 to 1 with Councillor Wendy Gaertner voting against the measure. The vote for the four-way stop at Wells and Harrison passed 5 to 2, with opposition coming from Councillors Gaertner and Gilliland.

Part of Councillor Gaertner's opposition to both crossings was the view that the southeast quadrant of Yonge and Wellington needs to be looked at through a broader lens.

"I think we have learned from past experiences, for example, putting parking restrictions in place, that a comprehensive approach is needed," she said. "Royal Road is extremely scary because trucks use it to cut through from Yonge to Edward Street and my experience with Wells and Kennedy, there is quite an incline there and there's a problem with sightlines."

"There are a lot of issues in this neighbourhood that have to do with speed and improper use. I would personally like to see a study of the area because putting a stop sign here may cause problems there. I think much more is needed and I don't want to set up one situation that causes a problem [elsewhere]."

HAVE YOUR SAY Are traffic calming measures needed on Wells Street? Are there other problem areas in the historic downtown area? Send your thoughts to brock@lpcmedia.ca.

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